

News Release

Annual celebration of Mexican arts, culture, and heritage awarded \$10,000 grant from the Northwest Minnesota Regional Arts Council

By ltollefs on Monday, January 10, 2011

A \$10,000 grant awarded by the Northwest Minnesota Regional Arts Council will support this year's Cinco de Mayo celebration at the University of Minnesota Crookston. The event is slated for Friday, April 15, 2011. The grant, offered through the Arts and Cultural Heritage fund, helps support access and exposure to the arts in all corners of the region. The goal of the Cinco de Mayo Celebration at the U of M Crookston is to promote learning, understanding and appreciation for the Mexican culture through traditional Mexican entertainment, crafts, and cuisine.



As director for the Northwest Minnesota Regional Arts Council, Mara Wittman is pleased to award the grant to help bring a cultural event of this caliber to the Crookston campus. "We are excited to be able to support a cultural event that highlights the Mexican culture and celebrates their arts, music, and customs," Wittman says. "This kind of event is what our funding is designed to support, and we are proud to be a part of helping bring this exciting opportunity to the Crookston campus and community, as well as the region."

Over the past two years, hundreds of people have attended the celebration at the U of M Crookston. The event is held in honor of Cinco de Mayo, a day that historically, represents the victory of Mexico over French forces at the Battle of Puebla in 1862 and culturally, represents Mexican heritage and pride.

The year's events include the dance troupe, Los Alegres Bailadores, who will perform in Kiehle Auditorium, a children's arts area that will include homemade piñata making, and the Latin Groove Band.

Melissa Dingmann, director of financial aid and Laurie Wilson, coordinator of disability services worked closely with Kenneth Mendez, a senior communication major, on the grant proposal. Mendez, who has been involved since the first celebration three years ago, wants to see the tradition continue on the campus. "'The collaborative effort among the University, Crookston Public Schools through the VOICES program, Northwest Minnesota Regional Arts Council, and the potential for new partners joining us is evidence that when we work together across boundaries of all kinds, we can enrich the quality of life for everyone in our region," Mendez says. "It is exciting to see this come together, and I would like to thank Chancellor Casey and the campus community for embracing the celebration."



Mendez's desire to see the Cinco de Mayo celebration continue after he graduates are being encouraged by having Janelle Encinia, a junior at the Crookston High School, shadow the preparations for this year's event. Encinia is also a post-secondary enrollment option student at the U of M Crookston and has been observing firsthand the event planning process to prepare her to take over the work Mendez started. "To know that the celebration will continue after I graduate is both gratifying and rewarding," Mendez says.

The Northwest Minnesota Arts Council serves the seven counties located in the northwest corner of the state. This activity is funded, in part, by a grant from the Northwest Minnesota Arts Council and the Minnesota arts and cultural heritage fund as appropriated by the Minnesota State Legislature with money from the vote of the people of Minnesota on November 4, 2008.

Today the University of Minnesota Crookston delivers 29 bachelor's degree programs, 18 minors, and more than 40 concentrations, including several online degrees, in the areas of agriculture and natural resources; business; liberal arts and education; and math, science and technology. With an enrollment of about 1,400 undergraduates from more than 25 countries and 40 states, the Crookston campus offers a supportive, close-knit atmosphere that leads to a prestigious University of Minnesota degree. "Small Campus. Big Degree." To learn more, visit www.umcrookston.edu.

In the photo at top right, (l to r): Front row: Thomas Williams, director of diversity programs; Janelle Encinia, a junior at the Crookston High School; Chuck Casey, chancellor; Ken Mendez, a senior communication major; Mara Wittman, director of the Northwest Minnesota Regional Arts Council. Back row: Peter Phaiah, associate vice chancellor for student affairs; Melissa Dingmann, director of financial aid; and Laurie Wilson, coordinator for disability services.

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